

## GUEST OPINION

# Unsung heroes helping keep schools open

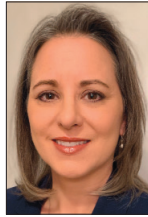
**By Jen Wimmer**

Several weeks into a very different school year than in previous years, many unsung heroes within the West Bend School District continue to play a major role in keeping the doors open.

These include the school health room professionals, bus drivers, as well as staff in our custodial, facilities, nutrition, technology, and library departments. Without them, our schools could not be offering in-person instruction this year or any other year. Just like our teachers, administrators, and students, they too have adjusted practices, added duties, and continue to show great resolve during a pandemic.

Our point person in each school for all things COVID-19 is the school health room professional; the West Bend School District is pleased to have one in each school. These professionals are well-versed regarding recommendations and requirements from the public health department. They are also part of the contact tracing team for their school, which includes leading the effort to contact families about quarantines. This is all done while continuing their job of dispensing medications, reviewing immunizations, and assisting with other illnesses and injuries. In just six months of school last year, our health room professionals collectively completed 43,648 office visits.

Throughout the summer, the facilities crew and custodians prepared the



**Wimmer**

schools for in-person instruction by moving out unnecessary furniture and installing hand sanitizer dispensers and bottle filling stations. During the school year, in addition to their regular cleaning, daily maintenance, and repair duties, they sanitize throughout the day, focusing on areas and items that are touched often. They provide sanitization supplies to classrooms and other areas, such as playgrounds. Importantly, they are the rapid response team that sanitizes any room where a person who tested positive for COVID-19 was present so it is safe for future occupants.

When schools were closed in March, the West Bend School District technology and library staff used a drive-through process to get Chromebooks and hotspots to all students who needed them for distance learning. At the end of the school year, they established another drive-through process to collect the devices for needed updates and repairs over the summer. At the same time, they procured thousands more Chromebooks so all students in grades K-12 would have their own device this school year. The library staff assisted in these large distribution operations while also preparing for adjustments in their library practices for 2020-2021 which include bringing library books to the classrooms.

Getting students to school and home requires some new procedures for bus drivers in 2020-2021. Bus drivers are sanitizing all highly touched areas of the bus between routes, as well as reminding students to wear their face masks on the bus. A bus driver shortage continues and I urge anyone interested in bus driving to contact Johnson Bus in West Bend at 262-334-3146.

The West Bend School District nutrition staff has incorporated changes to create a more "grab-and-go"-style of lunch lines to help decrease the risk of transferring germs. School Nutrition has also taken steps to wrap, package, and cover all food items, which both helps with safety and when students take their lunch to other areas in the building for physical distancing. This department is also looking to hire people to help with breakfast and lunch at several schools. Please contact Abby Padilla at 262-335-5528 if you are interested.

Of course, there are many others within our schools and in the district office such as teachers, aides, administrative assistants, registrars, school counselors, and many more who work in a variety of roles to support our students and schools. I cannot thank our entire staff enough for all they have done to get the schools ready to reopen and what they are now doing every day to help keep the doors open.

*(Jen Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)*